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Irene Ashton

or

The Stolen Child

Drama in Five Acts



By
HELEN BEATRICE LOCHLAN

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CHARACTERS

Mr. Copeley, *owner of Copeley Castle.*

Mrs. Hovey, *Mr. Copeley's sister.*

John West, *Mr. Copeley's head man.*

Kate Sefton, *Irish servant.*

Constance Hovey, *Mr. Copeley's niece.*

Beatrice Warren, *Constance's friend.*

Karl Webber, *chief of gypsy tribe.*

Jane Webber, *chief's wife.*

Waldo Webber, *their son.*

Irene Ashton, *a waif.*

Annie Wilman, *fortune teller.*

Mrs. Wallace, *a young widow.*

Clare, *her daughter.*

Alice Winthrop, *Mrs. Wallace's friend.*

Millie Stearns, *a school-girl.*

Jack Irving, *a strolling gypsy.*

Policeman, Band of Gypsies, Strollers into Gypsy Camp,

School Children.

Time — About one and a half hours.

COSTUMES AND SCENERY

Ordinary costumes are used by all except the gypsies, who should be attired grotesquely.

The stage represents a gentleman's study in the first and fourth acts, a lady's parlor in the second and third acts, and a gypsy camp with gypsies in the fifth act.

Notes

The success of the play depends largely on each player adapting himself or herself to his or her particular part. Do not act stiff, but all should have a certain dignity excepting the gypsies, who should be interested in their own work of telling fortunes, making baskets, etc. Music must be appropriate and can also be introduced between the acts.

Irene Ashton, or The Stolen Child

SCENE I

SCENE. — MR. COPELEY'S *home*. MR. COPELEY is sitting in deep meditation, a loud rap on the door causes him to start.

Enter KATE SEFTON, makes a courtesy.

KATE. Your honor, and it's meself that wouldn't be after troubling ye, but it's a vicious looking man that's been round here inquiring to see the gintleman of the place, and it's meself that towld him to be off with himself for a dirty thramp, but John, he says to me, says he, "Kate, will you spake to the master about letting some gypsies camp on the primises?" Gypsies, says I, bad luck to thim for a set of vagabonds! a dirty, thaving, lying lot, saving your presence, yer honor! (*Makes a courtesy.*)

MR. COPELEY (*laughing*). Well, Kate, my good woman, don't be too hard on the poor gypsies.

KATE. Hard is it, yer honer? ME hard? Faith, there is not a softer hearted person than meself living, and I'd turn meself inside out for a dacent, poor person, but the likes of thim thaving gypsies, the Lord save us from thim! (*Crossing herself.*)

Enter JOHN.

MR. C. Well, John, what is it about these gypsies?

JOHN. Well, sir, I thought, sir, as you always have so much sympathy for the poor and unfortunate that perhaps you might find it in your heart to let a wandering tribe of gypsies camp on the outskirts of your land, and I will see to it, sir, that they do not abuse the privilege.

MR. C. Well, John, why should I not? are they not all children of one father? A race to be pitied rather than despised. A strange class of people, to be sure, but you and I should not persecute them.' Yes, John, we will let them come and see if there be not some good even in the poor gypsies.

JOHN. All right, sir, thank you, sir.

KATE (*to JOHN*). And indade, is it yourself that's thrying to introduce those blackguards of gypsies onto the place? and faith, I hope they'll stale the clothes off your back before your through wid thim.

JOHN (*laughing*). Oh, not so bad as that, Kate, I hope.

[*Exit JOHN and KATE*]

MR. C. Well, this may seem weak and foolish in me to allow these gypsies to camp on my grounds, and there may be no end to the trouble they may make me, and still it is a simple request, to give a resting-place for a while to a wandering tribe of people; they are but living out their life, as we are living out our lives. But where were my thoughts before this interruption? Ah, I remember! can I ever forget my child, my long-lost child, my little Violet, lost in her early childhood? Memory is upon me to-night with all its power.

Would to Heaven, that I could find thee! Art thou at rest on yon blissful shore, where dwells my sainted mother? or can it be that thou art a wanderer on the earth, without shelter or a home? Answer me, ye glittering orbs of night, that shine forth from out yon ether blue, is she with you, my little Violet? The stars shine on, they answer not, they stop not in their course to speak to mortals. ALL, ALL is LAW. ETERNAL LAW.

Enter MRS. HOVEY. MR. COPELEY starts.

MRS. H. Paul, my brother, I overheard part of your soliloquy and my heart went out, as it always does, to comfort you in your trouble. You speak of Law, all, all is Law. And what is Law but God. Are not the earth, sky and air full of Him? In Him is life, and if He pervades all things, what, then, is Death?

MR. C. O sister! had I your faith I should be most happy. To me all things work by Law — this wondrous universe in which we live, the stars that shine, the planets in their order, the myriad forms of life upon the globe, all live by one great Power, the universal Law of cause and effect, and what are you and I but atoms in the scale?

MRS. H. But, Paul, you forget the soul. God is Spirit, Spirit is life; since Spirit pervades all life, there is no room for Death. If, as I believe, Violet be dead,— no, not dead, but living in another form — then she is not separated from you, but comes to you, even as the fragrance of this flower (*holds a bunch of violets in her hand*) is wafted to you by some invisible force. You see the body of the flower, its form, and coloring, but not its spirit, you inhale

its fragrance but cannot tell from whence it cometh, so it is with Spirit.

MR. C. Oh, could I believe that Violet lived, even in another sphere! and yet there are moments when a strange peace takes possession of my soul, and then I could almost believe I saw my sainted mother's face.

MRS. H. O Paul! believe it, and find sweet comfort in the thought, our dead still live, were it not for this faith, which to me has become a knowledge, I should have fainted by the wayside long ere this, but thank God who unsealed my eyes, that I could see and know my own can and do come to me. But I came to bring you these little flowers, they bear the name our darling bore. Let them be to you a token that she lives and loves you still.

But, Paul, I had almost forgotten to tell you that my dear little Constance has just arrived to-night with her friend and school-mate, Beatrice Warren, to spend the holidays. They are waiting to see you; let us try, my dear brother, and forget the past, with all its sorrows, and try and make these young people happy.

Let us sing some of the old songs to-night.

(Exit both.)

CLOSE OF SCENE I

SCENE II

SCENE.— MRS. WALLACE'S *sitting-room*. MRS. WALLACE and ALICE WINTHROP *sit sewing*.

MRS. W. How the old days come back to me to-day! Once more I seem to see myself, a bride leaving my father's home, and though sad the parting, yet the joy of going away with my young husband on our wedding trip gave a rosy hue to it all. How we enjoyed that trip on the Continent! and then how happy our journey home — all comes before me so vividly to-day. And then the sad ending to it all, my noble husband shot by brigands! Oh! it is too terrible!

(She bows her head and weeps.)

(In the distance is heard singing "Let the Dead and Beautiful Rest.")

ALICE. O Maude! I beg you not to weep so. Oh! why will you always remember those dreadful scenes? you know you have little Clare to live for and give you comfort.

Enter LITTLE CLARE with her doll.

CLARE. Why, what is the matter with my darling mama? Don't cry so, mama, you'll break my heart.

MRS. W. Well, darling, I will try and forget, for your sake, all the sorrows of my life, and live to make my little girl happy.

CLARE *(kissing her)*. That's a good mama, now I'll sing to you.

(CLARE sings, and while she sings, enter MILLY STEARNS with a bouquet of flowers.)

MILLY. Oh, excuse me, but I came over to play with Clare a little while, and mama sent you some flowers.

(MRS W. takes flowers and smells of them.)

MRS. W. How lovely they are, and how very kind of your mother to send them to me!

MILLY. Oh! a flower is a little thing, but mama says it carries a message of love to sorrowing hearts. I often wish I was a flower.

CLARE. Oh, I think you are nicer than a flower, 'cause a

flower couldn't play with me. I think it is nicer to be a little girl.

MILLY. What a funny little girl you are, Clare! Mrs. Wallace, did you know that the gypsies have come to town?

MRS. W. and ALICE (*together*). The gypsies! How dreadful! (*Both rise.*)

MILLY. Why, I thought it was just lovely. All the school children are just crazy about them; and, what do you think, we have all planned to go and visit their camp after school to-morrow. They are in the Copeley woods.

CLARE. Mama, may I go with Milly?

MRS. W. Oh no, my dear! the very thought makes me shudder.

MRS. W. (*to ALICE*). I do believe it was their coming to town that affected me so a little while ago.

ALICE. I have a perfect horror of them.

MRS. W. So have I, they are birds of ill omen.

MILLY. Oh! I almost forgot my errand. May Clare go to school with me to-morrow afternoon? I will see that she comes home all right.

CLARE. May I, mama?

MRS. W. Yes, if you wish to.

CURTAIN

CLOSE OF SCENE II.

PRELUDE TO SCENE III

SCENE.— *A group of children on their way to the gypsy camp.*

MILLY (*kissing CLARE*). Now, Clare, you must go right straight home. We are going to the gypsy camp.

(*They stop and sing. CLARE goes out. Music in the distance. They stop and listen.*)

MILLY. What lovely music! But we must go or we shan't get home before dark.

(*All go out.*)

SCENE III

SCENE. — MRS. WALLACE'S *sitting-room*.

MRS. W. (*nervously*). Alice, see how dark it is growing, and Clare does not come, you don't suppose anything could have happened to her?

ALICE. Oh, nonsense! what could have happened? but if you would feel any easier in your mind, I will run over to Milly's and see. But, hark! I hear the bell.

Enter MILLY, all out of breath.

MILLY. O MRS. WALLACE! has Clare come?

MRS. W. Clare! why where is she? (*faints.*)

(*ALICE runs to catch her and restores her.*)

(*Servants rush in.*)

ALICE (*to MILLY*). Call a policeman.

(*MILLY goes out and returns with a POLICEMAN.*)

POLICEMAN. What is the matter, madam?

ALICE and MRS. W. Clare is lost, we think she has been stolen.

MRS. W. Oh, find her! in the name of Heaven.

POLICEMAN. We will, as soon as you give us a clue.

MILLY. I think she went to see the gypsies, she talked of nothing else.

MRS. W. Oh, I knew it! I knew it. They'll kill her. O merciful Father!

ALICE. Don't, dear, this officer will find her.

POLICEMAN. That I will. Where did you say the gypsies were?

ALICE. In Mr. Copeley's woods.

(POLICEMAN *takes notes and leaves, saying, We will report.*)

MRS. W. Wait: I will go with you.

ALICE. Well, if you go, I will follow. O those horrid gypsies!

CURTAIN

CLOSE OF SCENE III

SCENE IV

SCENE. — MR. COPELEY *in his study. A sharp ring at the door, enter KATE, excitedly.*

KATE. Mr. Copeley, a lady to see you, sir.

MR. C. To see me? show her in, Kate.

Enter MRS. WALLACE.

MRS. W. O sir! my child, my only one, is lost. We have traced her to your grounds, where camp the gypsies.

(She falls into the arms of MRS. HOVEY, who enters in time to catch her.)

(KATE is wringing her hands and calling on the saints to deliver her from the thaving, lying gypsies.)

MR. C. *(to KATE).* Call John.

Enter JOHN.

MR. C. John, I hear grave charges concerning this band of gypsies camping on my lands.

JOHN. What, sir?

MR. C. I hear that a child has been abducted: investigate at once and send me word.

(JOHN goes out.)

CURTAIN

CLOSE OF SCENE IV

SCENE V

SCENE. — *The gypsy camp. KARL WEBBER is playing the banjo. IRENE ASHTON, the waif, is singing and dancing to a group of people. ANNIE WALTON, a pretty gypsy, is telling fortunes. JANE WEBBER is peering cautiously into the face of every newcomer. IRENE is the gayest of the gay. In the midst of the scene she goes out and encounters JACK IRVING in hunting suit.*

IRENE. Why, here comes Jack! any luck to-day, Jack?

JACK. No, the birds were too shy, no luck for me, everything goes against me.

IRENE. Blue, Jack, as usual. Well; I know how to pity you, but there is luck in store for you, sure.

(IRENE goes back into camp.)

(MRS. HOVEY enters, goes into camp, when she goes out she drops her basket of violets. IRENE goes out after her, picks up basket, smells flowers.)

IRENE. That lovely lady dropped these beautiful flowers: I will run and give them to her.

To MRS. HOVEY. Lady, you dropped these lovely flowers.

MRS. HOVEY. Oh! you dear child, did I? Well, you are welcome to them.

IRENE. Oh, thank you!

(MRS. HOVEY goes out.)

IRENE (*to herself*). It seems as if I'd seen her before. I suppose that is one of my dreams. Oh, how I love violets! they are to me the sweetest flowers that grow, and yet they always make me sad. I wonder why. How distasteful this life is to me! Oh how I hate it all! I often wonder where I began it, for something tells me I was not always one of these people and, sometimes, when I am alone, under the canopy of the stars, a voice seems to speak to me, "My child." Oh! can it be that I have a mother, even up among the stars, that lives and pities me. But I must go back and help to amuse these people.

(KARL and JANE WEBBER *come into camp.*)

JANE. Well, here's a pretty kettle of fish.

WALDO. What's the matter now, mother?

JANE. Oh, a young one strayed into camp. Pretty as a picture, but a good-for-nothing brat, I'll be bound; now, I wonder whose child it is.

KARL. Off with her! off with her! we don't want no more brats here: got enough now. (*Looks at IRENE.*)

(LITTLE CLARE *comes in crying*, IRENE *tries to stop her.*)

IRENE. Oh, you dear little girl! don't cry. No one shall hurt you. I'll take care of you.

KARL. You, you good-for-nothing lazy baggage, you! You ain't worth your salt. You are too proud to beg, and you won't steal. Want to be a lady, don't you?

JANE. Humph! a pretty lady you'd make.

WALDO. There, don't make Irene cry again, I think you've both said enough.

(IRENE *goes out clasping her hands and looking up.*)

IRENE. O God! if there be a God, pity me and take me away from these people.

(IRENE *steps forward and sees JACK standing alone.*)

IRENE. You here, Jack? Have you seen the little girl?

JACK. What little girl, Irene?

IRENE. Why, a little girl has strayed into camp — such a pretty name, Clare Wallace.

JACK (*starting*). Clare what?

IRENE. Wallace. Why, how strange you look!

JACK. Where is she?

(IRENE *leads her out.*)

CLARE. I want to find my mama.

JACK. Who is she? What is her first name?

CLARE. Cousin Alice calls her Maude.

JACK. Great Heaven! can it be my wife? is she living? can it be? and this my child?

Enter MRS. WALLACE and ALICE

(JACK, *with hat off, is bending over CLARE, MRS. WALLACE screams, "My husband!" and falls into his arms.*)

Enter JANE and KARL

JACK. Mrs. Webber, behold my wife and child, not dead, as I supposed, but living.

JANE. Law sakes! didn't I always tell you there was good luck in store for you? Wall, now, I am real glad for you.

MRS. W. (*clinging to JACK*). Explain, Jack, how did it all happen?

JANE. Well, you see those brigands left him for dead, and Karl and I, we picked him up, carried him to our tent and nursed him back to life. The story was that his wife and child were killed, so he has always lived with us.

JACK. And now we will all live together, shan't we, Maude?

MRS. W. Yes, and I shall always love the gypsies, for they restored to me my husband.

ALICE. Then they are not "birds of ill omen."

(*IRENE goes to one side and sings.*)

Enter MR. COPELEY and MRS. HOVEY.

MR. C. Whose voice is that?

JANE. Oh! that is Irene, the waif, she is always singing that song, says she learned it in her dreams; she is a strange child, sir.

MR. C. Whose child is she?

JANE. That's what I've been trying to find out, sir.

MR. C. How came you by her?

JANE. Oh! many years ago, there came to us a poor woman leading by the hand this little child. She was weak and sick and didn't seem all right in her head, sir. She only lived a few days, she tried to tell us something about the child, but she was too weak, sir, but we found a letter, sir, but no one could ever read it, sir. Inside was a ring tied with ribbon. She told us by signs to keep them — we've tried and tried to find her folks, sir. Karl and I aint got no eddication, so we could n't read the letter, but I'll get it, sir, and, as you seem to be a gentleman of larning, perhaps you can make it out.

(*Gets letter and hands it to MR. COPELEY, MRS. HOVEY looks over his shoulder.*)

MRS. H. Why, Paul, it is Meg's writing. Poor cousin Meg, who went crazy after the death of her child. She disappeared about the same time Violet did. You know they thought she made away with herself. She has written this in French.

(MR. COPELEY reads MEG's letter.)

MEG'S LETTER

Oh, my poor brain! But the child, — yes, I've got her! They called her Violet (*aside*, VIOLET, VIOLET). But she's *my* little Irene. See, here's the little ring I took and tied with blue ribbon.

(MR. COPELEY reads the initials V. C.)

MR. C. It is, it must be, my Violet. Oh, where is she? where is she?

JANE. You mean Irene, I'll fetch her.

(Goes out and returns with IRENE.)

JANE. This gentleman wants to know all about you.

MR. C. Tell me all you remember of your early life.

IRENE. Oh, many things, sir, that seem like dreams. I remember an old woman who took care of me, and called me her lost baby. She talked of Paul and Eva.

MRS. H. That's what poor Meg always called me.

IRENE. She put this little chain on my neck and told me to always keep it for it would bring me luck.

(MR. COPELEY looks at it.)

MR. C. So it has, it has brought you a father, this little chain. I bought it for you in Paris and had it marked in Italian. Come to me, my Violet. (*Takes her tenderly to him.*) Behold your father and your Aunt Eveline. We have mourned you dead for many years.

(MRS. HOVEY embraces IRENE.)

IRENE (*lifting her eyes to heaven*). O pitying angels! can this be true, this noble gentleman my father, the lovely lady my aunt, this beautiful home mine?

MR. C. Yes, yours, all yours (*to JANE*). And now, my good woman, how shall I reward you and your good husband for all you have done for my child?

JANE (*crying*). Well, I haint done much for her, but if you could find some work for Karl and give me a place in your kitchen: I've kind of tired of this life.

KARL. You know Jack asked us to live with him.

MR. C. Well, I guess I shall have to adopt you all.

Enter KATE SEFTON from farther side.

KATE. Now, I wonder what became of the old one. Holy Mother! there she is (*pointing to JANE*) — and look at the gypsies (*she laughs*). And the Lord save us! if there isn't the Master and Missis. What in the world is the matter? (*She crosses over and makes a courtesy to MR. COPELEY and MRS. HOVEY, (to MRS. HOVEY).* And, saving yer presence, ma'am, isn't this a queer place for the likes of you to be in?

MRS. H. Haven't you heard the news, Kate?

KATE. What news?

MRS. H. Why, Mr. Copeley has found his lost child here in the gypsy camp.

KATE (*with horror*). Is it a gypsy, she is?

MRS. H. No, Kate, but the gypsies found her and have restored her to her father.

KATE. Then the saints reward thim, and I'll never say a word agin the gypsies again.

MR. C. We have proven that there is some good even in the poor gypsies.

Enter JOHN, bowing politely

JOHN. Well, sir, I can congratulate you. It was a good investment, sir.

MR. C. Yes, John, it was, it shows how in entertaining strangers we may be entertaining angels unawares.

(All form a circle and sing.)

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